

Interview with Jürg Schelldorfer

The SSS congratulates you on your accreditation as a professional statistician by FENStatS. How did you find out that this possibility existed?

I read about it in the last SSS Bulletin.

What were your motivations for applying for accreditation?

I am a qualified actuary (actuarial scientist) and am therefore familiar with accreditations in professional life. I see with actuaries how profitable and important professional associations and accreditations are. In my years in the insurance industry, I was regularly confronted with the fact that an education in statistics at a Swiss university is classified as an "inferior" education in the international industry. It is only through working together that my colleagues see (to their great surprise) that I really do have a grasp of statistics. As a graduate of ETH Zurich, such an encounter hurts my heart! I see the accreditation as an opportunity to give the excellent statistics education in Switzerland a European perspective and thus make it more internationally recognisable. As explained below, I see the need to distinguish between professional, experienced and qualified statisticians and those with basic knowledge. The last year in particular has shown that everyone in Switzerland is now a statistician. As experts, we have now experienced the situation that has existed in football for much longer: the coach, who makes decisions and has the responsibility and education, is confronted with the spectator, who always seems to know it better. But is that really the case?

Were you sufficiently supported by the SSS in this process?

The SSS has done a lot of preparatory work in the background here and I am pleased that Switzerland is one of the first societies to be accredited. The process and the requirements are clear. The SSS President Stella Bollmann has been able to answer the questions I still have.

We would like you to answer a few more questions about yourself for the members of the SSS. Can you give us a few details about your education?

I studied mathematics with a focus on statistics at the ETH Zurich and then did my doctorate in statistics with Prof. Dr. Peter Bühlmann and Prof. Dr. Sara van der Geer. Due to my change to the insurance industry, I also trained part-time to become an "Actuary SAV".

What is your current professional activity and what were important earlier stations?

I have been working as a Senior Actuarial Data Scientist at Swiss Re for more than three years. In this role, I deal with statistical, actuarial and technological issues relating to the use and evaluation of data for data-based decisions. Previously, I worked as a non-life actuary for the consulting firm KPMG and the insurance company Axa Switzerland. What I really enjoy about my current job is the combination of statistical and actuarial topics and the close collaboration with data experts with a strong background in computer science.

What do you see as the biggest challenges for statistics and the profession of statistician in the coming years?

I think there are three major trends that statistics has to deal with.

First, as in many disciplines, there is a democratisation of knowledge. Everyone has access to basic knowledge and can acquire it. I see an advantage, especially from a social point of view, in the fact that there are no obstacles to accessing and acquiring this knowledge. However, it

also brings challenges in how a layperson with statistical knowledge differs from a proven statistician with a lot of experience. Basic knowledge and access to knowledge per se can no longer be it. Is it experience? Does he adhere to professional or ethical standards? Does he continue his education on a regular basis? Accreditation is, in my view, the right way to address this challenge.

Secondly, statistics must actively define its role in the field of data science and not simply allow itself to be driven. This assessment is in line with many articles I have read at the IMS. Does statistics want to play a role here or should it be left to other professions?

Thirdly, the last year has shown that the role of statistics in society, institutions and the media is probably more in the background and that people prefer to remain on the sidelines when decisions are being made rather than being actively involved in politics, the public and administration. Is there not also a social responsibility to get involved in statistical issues in society? I don't know the answer to that either.

Where would you like to see more activity from the SSS?

A large part of the work of the SSS is done by voluntary and committed members who make the activities of the SSS possible with a lot of heart and soul. I would therefore like to express my sincere thanks to all committed members. I hope that we will continue to have many dedicated members in the future who are committed to the profession of statisticians.